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ABSTRACT

Previous research and literature have shown that college students' and premarital couples' perceptions and attitudes toward marriage and family are only partially understood by researchers and educators. This study was conducted to examine the attitudes of Mexican American and Anglo American college students regarding marriage partners. Students (N=128) completed a Potential Spouse Checklist which consisted of 409 behaviors and eight attributional items representing activities common in marriage. Students reported their opinions concerning those activities viewed as important in maintaining a good marital relationship. The results revealed some cultural differences between Mexican American and Anglo American subjects regarding expectations about marriage. The Potential Spouse Checklist reflected significant differences for Anglo Americans and Mexican Americans as well as for males and females in the areas of Companionship, Affection, House Management, and Personal Habits. Overall results are consistent with previous studies which have suggested no important differences between Anglo Americans and Mexican Americans for martial satisfaction, ethnicities, family cohesion, and adaptability. (Fifty-three references are included.) (NB)

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Cultural Differences in Premarital Attributions Regarding Successful Marriages

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Abstract

Attitudes of Mexican American and Anglo American college students (N = 128) from a Potential Spouse Checklist were analyzed. Attention is given to developing a more systematic evaluation of premarital expectations so as to impact premarital counseling strategies. It was expected that cultural differences between Mexican American and Anglo American subjects regarding expectations about marriage would be reflected in their responses. In addition, results of attributions of personal responsibility regarding the success of marriage will be discussed.

Cultural Differences in Premarital Attributions Regarding Successful Marriages

Marriage and family life in America have been altered since the post World War II babies have matured into adults. This generation of young adults, aged 20-38, comprises one third of the U.S. population or roughly 72 million Americans (U.S. Department of Commerce, 1984. Since 1980, the Hispanic population has grown five times faster than the rest of the United States and is projected to be the largest minority group by 1990 ("Hispanic Population", 1987). Consequently, as these young adults move through the life cycle, modifications in family structure, composition, values, and socialization patterns are being fundamentally altered. This premise is not only true for the middle class Anglo American but Mexican American as well (Cromwell & Cromwell, 1978; Bean, Russell & Marcum, 1977; Zinn, 1980; Ybarra, 1982; Vega, et al., 1985). As a result previous research has not indicated no significant differences between Anglos and Mexican Americans on key variables such as marital satisfaction covarying with family size, wife's labor-force participation or conjugal power have emerged. These findings are especially true when there is high acculturation among the Mexican American families (Vega, et al., 1985). What differences do exist between these two cultural groups and within these two groups may be those of degree rather than type. Therefore, if

the values, family structure and composition of these young adults are truly changing, this generation of young adults may be the most significant change agent ever for producing new definitions of family life. Further, this perceived change may become normative in marriage, remarriage, parenting, and families.

There are several factors which may contribute to the aforementioned changes in attitudes toward marriage and family in our culture today.

1. Possibly the most significant contributing factor may be the decline of the extended family and the development of the nuclear family. This is especially true of Hispanics where the movement has been away from an extended family orientation to the nuclear family structure (Sena-Rivera, 1979). Today, the most common family structure is one where both parents are employed and the children receive care outside the home during the day (Wattenberg, 1980, 1986). Moreover, the number of married couples choosing to remain childless or have fewer children is smaller than it has ever been in history (Wattenberg, 1986).

2. Another factor is the leveling off of the divorce rate. After a fifteen year rise, the divorce rate has stabilized (U.S. Department of Commerce, 1986). Even though marital instability has become "normal", divorce is still a reasonable resolution to an unhappy marriage. The result is the United States has the

highest divorce rate in the world (Norton, 1983). It is projected by the year 1990, one-half of all Americans will spend role expectations and relationships (Keller, Maxwell & Ritzert, 1978). Current role conflicts include women who are participating in professional employment. The current rate of 67% working women is the largest in United States history. The presence of two wage earners is a distinguishing characteristic of many young families. In 1982, two-parent families in prime childbearing ages depended overwhelmingly on two incomes (Wattenberg, 1986). Sex roles are changing so dramatically that Merriman and Hyer (1984) contend that individuals must examine these sex roles within their relationships. How these attitudes affect the creation and intricate networks of future marriages has not been fully researched (Martin & Martin, 1984).

In an attempt to better understand the present attitudes and modifications in marriage and family dynamics more attention is being turned toward marriage preparation. Counselors and educators are becoming marriage. Several authors have noted that couples who take the effort to work through some of the major issues of married life will benefit from premarital counseling (Ard & Ard, 1976; Wells, 1976).

In order to meet the needs of various populations, premarital counseling programs have proliferated throughout the United States. Examples of such programs are: dating couples

(Schlain, 1971), couples living with their parents (Rolfe, 1977), the handicapped and disabled (Stallings, 1968; Walker, 1977), couples in which one of the partners is a minor (Shonick, 1972), teenage couples (Reiner & Edwards, 1974; Rolfe, 1976; Rice, 1972), West Point cadets (Gledening & Wilson, 1972, members of particular religious denominatins (Dates & Rowatt, 1975, Rolfe, 1975, Wright, 1977), university students (D'Arigelli, Deyes, Guerney, Hershenberg & Shordfsky, 1974; Hinkle & Moore, 1971; Meadows & Taplan, 1970; VanZoost, 1973), and the general public (Bernstein, 1977; Freeman, 1965; Ridley, Avery, Harrell, Leslie, & O'Connor, 1970). Given that the large number of programs available vary greatly in content and format, it would seem beneficial to evaluate programs which are helpful to those couples preparing for marriage. Fortunately, in the last five years there have been more systematic attempts to develop inventories and communication training programs. Researchers have identified and isolated certain factors associated with the success or failure of various marriage preparation approaches (Bagarozzi & Rauen, 1981; Fournier, 1982; Fournier & Olson, 1986; Most & Gurney, 1983, Olson, 1983). Although premarital programs have been identified as effectiveness (Bader, Microys, Sinclair, Willett & Conway, 1980; Garland, 1981). By comparison, those couples who participated in counseling before and after their

wedding reported post wedding counseling to be most effective (Bader, et al., 1980; Guldner, 1971).

Although the long-term effects of premarital counseling have yet to be substantiated, there have been numerous reviews of contemporary premarital programs published (Bagarozzi, et. al., 1984). In 1981, Bagarozzi and Raven employed standardized procedures and intervention techniques to assess premarital treatment effectiveness. They surveyed over 50 programs, only 13 studies met their criteria for program effectiveness. Those two criteria being appropriateness of content and adequacy of research methods or designs (Bagarozzi, et. al., 1984). Appropriate content should include developmental tasks that the couple will face early in marriage, and appropriate behavioral skills such as communication, problem solving and positive behavior changes. These suggestions lend credence to several other studies which demonstrated couples can increase their communications and conflict resolution skills (Bader, et. al., 1980; Ridley, et. al., 1981a; 1981b). Also, Druckman et. al. (1981), demonstrated the value of a structured premarital inventory like P R E P A R E to increase a couple's awareness of the strengths and weaknesses in their relationship. Other studies have indicated the value of functional or process oriented programs (Avery & Ridley, 1980; Bader, et. al., 1980).

As previous research and literature has shown, college students and premarital couples perceptions and attitudes toward marriage and family are only partially understood by researchers and educators. In addition, the research in marriage and family has predominantly focused on Anglo Americans and has been lacking for Hispanic clients (Falicov, 1982). Therefore, from the research available some marriage and family expectations have been delineated while other areas have eluded scrutiny. Given the clarity of the cultural nature of the marriage relationship, this present study examines the attitudes of Mexican American and Anglo American students regarding marriage partners. Expectations differ in marriage between Mex. Amer-Anglo; attributions of personal responsibility.

Method

Subjects

Eighty subjects for this study were recruited from an introductory Psychology class at a large southwestern university. All students who participated were volunteers and received partial credit. The other 48 students were recruited from the university mailing list. The subjects who agreed to participate by mail did so by returning the completed forms.

Materials

Weiss, Hops & Patterson (1973) were the first to examine relationship adjustment in terms of the rate at which positive or

negative behaviors were exchanged between spouses. As a result an eight page listing of specific pleasing and displeasing relationship behaviors were designed. This instrument, called the Spouse Observation Checklist (SOC), contains 400 items that were a priority categorized as pleasing or displeasing. Each item categorized into content areas such as Childcare, Finances, Personal Appearance, Housekeeping, Affection, etc. Within these categories couples record the frequency of occurrences for those behaviors they consider pleasing or displeasing from their spouse.

From this checklist alterations were made to produce the Potential Spouse Checklist. This instrument, much like the SOC, has 409 behaviors as well as eight attributional items which are activities common in marriage. The instrument is a self-report inventory that assesses students' opinions concerning those activities viewed as important in mantaining a good marital relationship. The instrument provides information along the same content areas as the SOC (communication, affection, finances, etc.). Designed as a behaviorally specific measurement of premarital expectations, this instrument was developed to identify important opinions and attitudes for major areas of marital interaction, that is, the 12 areas of the SOC.

Results

To assess the expectations that Anglo Americans and Hispanics have regarding marriage a 2x2 factorial design was employed. The two independent variables were race, Hispanic and Anglo Americans, and gender, males and females. The measure used to obtain responses from each subject was the Potential Spouse Checklist consisting of 13 subscales (the results summarized in Table 1). As indicated in Table 2 there were significant interactions for the Companionship and Affection scales. Figures 1-4 illustrate these significant differences. There were also significant main effects indicated between males and females for House Management and race for the personal habits attributions. These differences in expectations are shown in Figures 3 and 4. All other analysis of variance were non significant.

Discussion

As anticipated, there were some cultural differences between Mexican American and Anglo American subjects regarding expectations about marriage. The Potential Spouse Checklist (PSC) reflected significant differences for Anglos and Hispanics as well as for males and females in the areas of Companionship, Affection, House Management and Personal Habits. Although the main purpose of this study was primarily exploratory and descriptive in nature with any causal analysis being of secondary importance, there were some interesting interactions. For

example, results from the Companionship subscale indicated white females had the highest expectations with Hispanic male and white females having higher expectations than either of their counterpart (see Figure 1). Similarly white females had high Affection scores as did the Hispanic males while both their counterparts reported lower (see Figure 2). Conversely Personal Habits expectations were higher for the Hispanics than either of the Anglo American genders (see Figure 3).

The results overall for the PSC are consistent with previous studies which have suggested no important differences between Anglos and Mexican Americans for marital satisfaction, ethnicities, family cohesion and adaptability (Hartzler, Franco, 1985; Vega, Patterson, Dallis, Nader, Atkins, Abramson, 1986; Bean, Russell, Marcum, 1977). Although the present data suggest some expectations that might predispose different routes to marital satisfaction for both Hispanics and Anglos, the general findings are virtually indistinguishable and may suggest only tenable variations to the courtship differences between the two ethnic groups. This study does take another desirable step in relationships by delineating important expectations and characteristics of the courtship process for both Hispanic and Anglo Americans. This study also forms a basis for a more comprehensive investigation of premarital relationships.

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Table 1

Results of ANOVA's for PSC

	Gender		Race		Gender x Race	
Variable	F	p	F	p	F	p
Companionship	1.38	.24	.31	.58	3.97	.05
Affection	.05	.82	.01	90	6.48	.01
Consideration	.92	3.4	3.04	.08	1.92	.17
Sex	1.49	.22	3.39	.07	2.13	.15
Communication	2.99	.09	1.31	.25	1.10	.30
Coupling Act.	.25	.62	2.29	.13	.13	.71
Child Care	1.33	.25	0.00	.96	.22	.64
House/Manag.	6.65	.01	.01	.93	.15	.70
Finances	2.90	.09	.51	.48	.35	.55
Employment/Education	.65	.42	.08	.78	0.00	.99
Appearance	.09	.77	0.00	.10	1.22	.27
Personal Habit	.32	.57	3.96	.05	.04	.85

Table 2

Source tables for Potential Spouse Checklist comparing gender vs. race

Companionship

Source	SS	df	MS	F	p
Race	20.77	1	20.77	.31	.5791
Gender	92.74	1	92.74	1.38	.2422
Race x Gender	266.67	1	266.67	3.97	.0487
Error	7379.92	110	67.09		

Affection

Source	SS	df	MS	F	p
Race	.18	1	.18	.01	.9079
Gender	.71	1	.71	.05	.8162
Race x Gender	84.54	1	84.54	6.48	.0123
Error	1434.21	110	13.04		

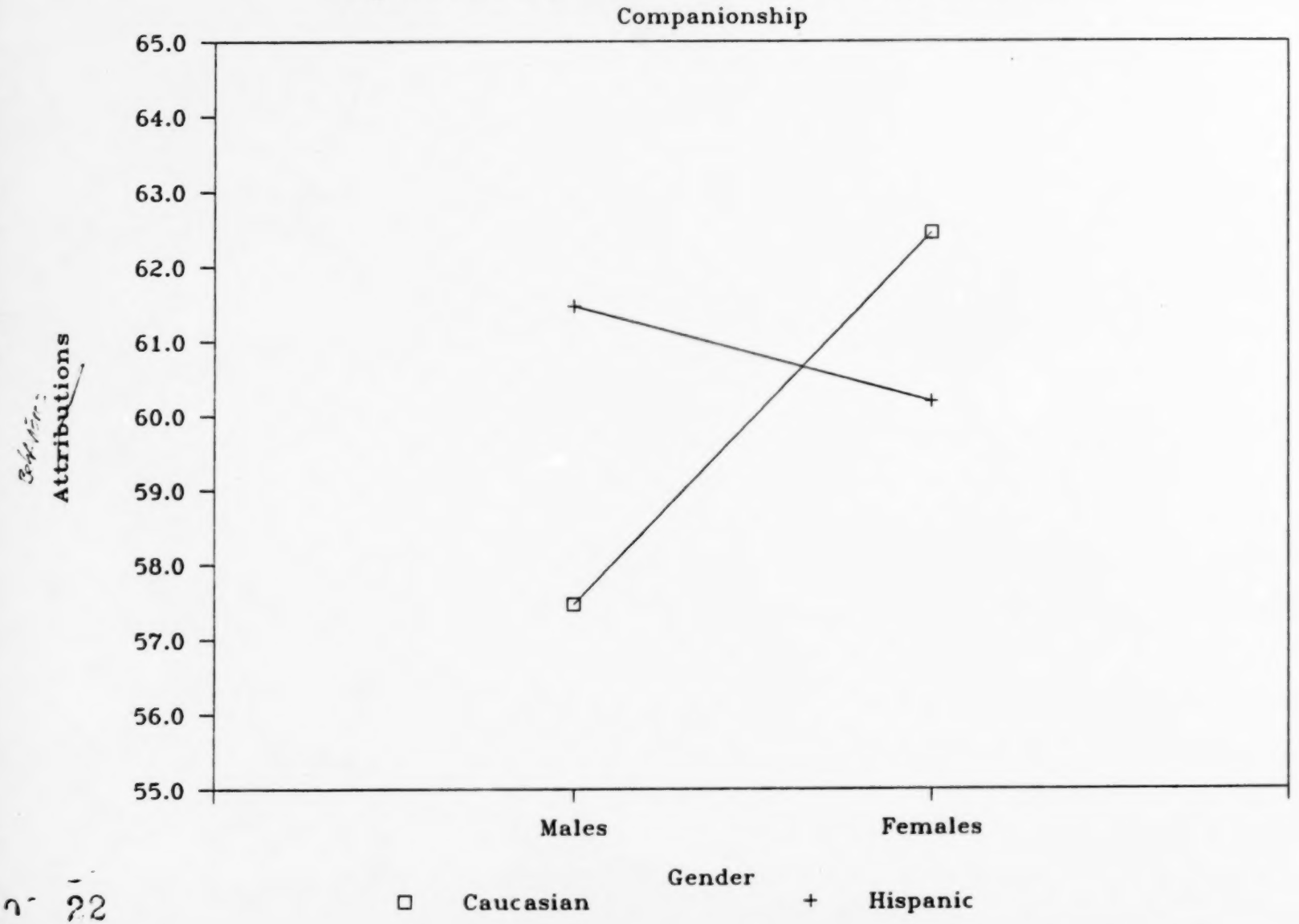
House Management

Source	SS	df	MS	F	p
Race	.48	1	.48	.01	.9348
Gender	478.68	1	478.68	6.65	.0113
Race x Gender	11.05	1	11.05	.15	.6960
Error	7923.81	110	72.03		

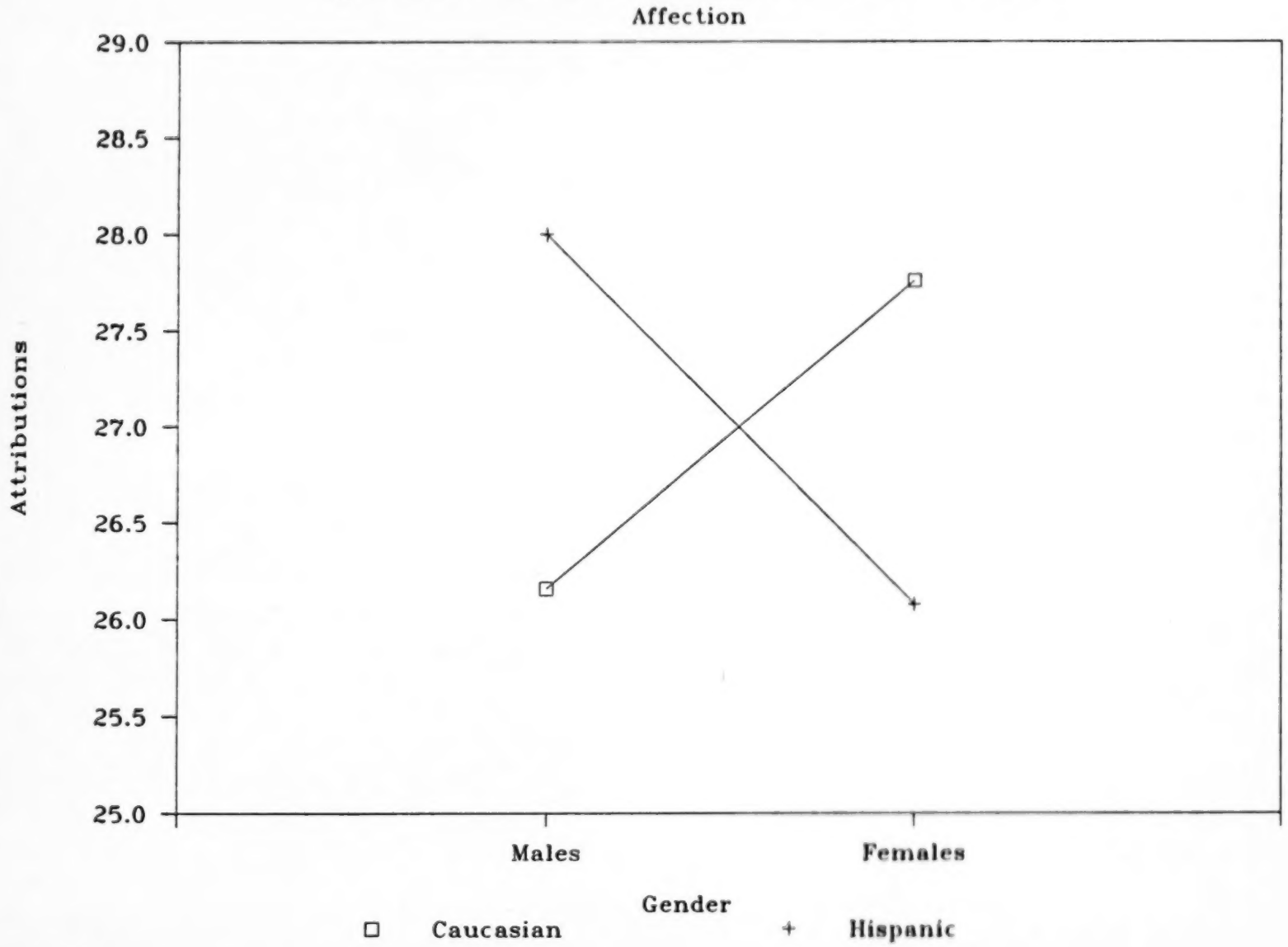
Personal Habits

Source	SS	df	MS	F	p
Race	49.71	1	49.71	3.96	.0490
Gender	3.96	1	3.96	.32	.5754
Race x Gender	.46	1	.46	.04	.8480
Error	1380.04	110	12.55		

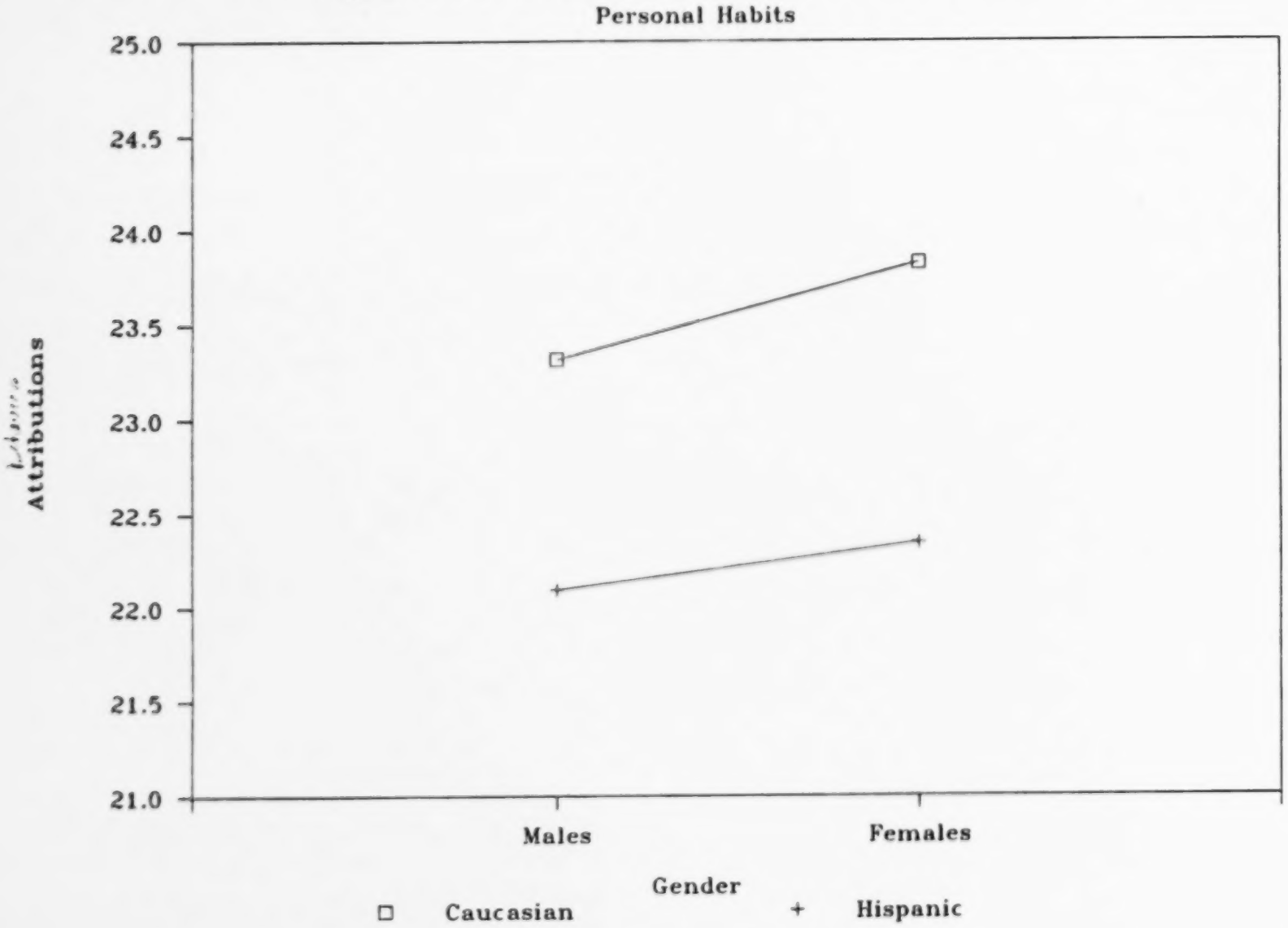
Spouse Observation Checklist



Spouse Observation Checklist



Spouse Observation Checklist



Spouse Observation Checklist